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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001449

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2011

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR VISITS SOKOTO STATE: OFR  
SUPPORTED, SHARIA DISCUSSED

Classified by Ambassador Howard f. Jeter, reason 1.5 (B/D).

#### Summary

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11. (U) In his first trip to the Northwest, Ambassador Jeter travelled to Sokoto State on June 19 and 20 to hold meetings with Governor Bafarawa, Sultan of Sokoto Maccido and Brigade One Commander General Emejuru. The Ambassador thanked the officials for their support for Operation Focus Relief Phase I training that took place in Sokoto State last Autumn, and asked for their support for future training in the Northwest region. Governor Bafarawa described his Administration's progress, and his low-key approach to Sharia (and the limitations of his non-confrontational style). Both he, the Sultan and General Emerju pledged support for OFR III. End summary.

#### The Governor

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12. (C) Governor Attahiru Bafarawa welcomed the Ambassador and the Embassy delegation, including the USAID Director, DATT and Poloff, with a State Dinner on the 19th, followed by a private meeting on the 20th. The Ambassador began the discussion by asking what gains democracy had brought Sokoto State in the past two years. The Governor responded, "the difference between military government and democracy is that I am from Sokoto State, I am responsible to my people and I am not going anywhere." This compared favorably to military Governors from other parts of the country who, he said, did not dare return to their former constituency, given their wholesale theft of funds while in office. As an example of his fiscal rectitude, Bafarawa said that Sokoto State's budget for the past two years had been approximately 8.6 billion naira (about USD 80 million). He said of that amount, most of the money has gone to building roads, schools, hospitals and rural development (usually potable water) projects. The Governor noted, with some degree of pride, that he had paid off 700 million naira in outstanding debts from the former military administration and had set aside one billion naira in an emergency fund. "Without borrowing a penny," Bafarawa stated with a broad smile.

13. (C) On corruption, Bafarawa said that he is firmly in control of State Government officials: "If the leader is corrupt, the whole body will be corrupt--if the leader steals, everyone looks to get his share." When asked his assessment of the Obasanjo Administration's sincerity in its anti-corruption efforts, Bafarawa said flatly that the President's Ministers are corrupt. Foremost on his list of corrupt officials was Tony Anenih, Minister of Works and Housing. Bafarawa said that if Obasanjo meant to make serious inroads into corruption, he would have to forego the complicated zoning arrangements that keep certain Ministries tied to certain states, and hire the most competent people he could find. (Comment: Corruption within Federal Ministries is indeed rife. Anenih appears untouchable, given his position as one of Obasanjo's key political fixers.8 End comment).

14. (C) Asked about the performance of local government officials, the Governor opined that the Federal Government was "complicit" in their "looting." The 20 percent apportionment that Local Government Councils (LGC) received from the federal government was paid directly to LGCs, instead of being funneled through state governments as required by the Constitution. "Since they have control of their own money, there is little I can do to stop them from stealing it." He complained bitterly about ALGON (All Local Government Association of Nigeria), which had been set up by the Federal Government in Abuja to direct LGA spending. He repeated the well-publicized case of ALGON's purchase of Toyota Prados for the 774 LGC's without their permission--a contract alleged to have been arranged by Vice President Atiku Abubakar, and to have netted roughly USD 30,000 per vehicle in kick-backs to various federal officials.

15. (C) On Sharia reforms in the North, Bafarawa professed a low-key approach. "If Sharia is done properly, no one will notice. It has always been a part of our religion and culture." Alluding to Governor Ahmed Sani of Zamfara State and his intrusive and controversial Sharia regime, Bafarawa said that Sharia "only becomes dangerous when it is used for political gain." Bafarawa noted the recent meeting in Abuja between National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed and Governors from eleven Northern states which had adopted new Sharia legislation, a session devoted to "harmonization" of Sharia approaches, in an attempt to prevent Sharia from being used as a political tool by their opponents.

16. (C) Bafarawa mentioned that one local Sharia judge in Sokoto had handed down a sentence of amputation for a confessed thief, and that the defendant refused to appeal. Bafarawa had set up a committee of Sharia scholars to review the case, and to determine whether the case met all the elements required for imposing amputation under classical Sharia doctrine. The Governor said that he would allow the sentence to be carried out if the committee sustains the judge's decision. "It's not my business. I am not the judge, and this is what the people have asked for." He said he could over-ride the judgment of a Shari'a court--even if no appeal was filed--only when there were proper grounds for doing so in classical Sharia law.

17. (C) Ambassador Jeter said that the USG's concern was primarily for the potential impact of Sharia on non-Muslims, and the human rights consequences that would follow. Bafarawa replied, "It is something to be handled with care." He said that in Sokoto State, consumption of alcohol by Christians in private is not criminalized, and in fact alcohol is sold freely at Sokoto's military and police messes and military grocery stores. More importantly, none of the laws regulating social comportment that had been passed in Zamfara--requiring a dress code for women and banning mixed-gender public transport--had been introduced in Sokoto, the seat of the highest Muslim traditional authority in Nigeria. Public school classes were divided by gender after a certain age, and more girls were being sent to school since this change was imposed, he said. Christian children in Sokoto were taught "Christian religious knowledge," (CRK) while their Muslim counterparts were instructed in the Koran, he said (Comment: It is a long-running struggle throughout Nigeria for religious minorities to be provided instruction in their own faith in the public schools. End Comment).

18. (C) Governor Bafarawa articulated the perception by some Northern governors and Northern populations--not often expressed directly to USG officials--that the USG is more interested in the South of Nigeria, and focuses more of its energy and resources on Southern states. That Ambassador Jeter made his first official visit to Kaduna and Kano, and was undertaking a trip to Kebbi and Sokoto so early in his tenure, was taken as a sign of encouragement to Northern governors that the USG would have a more "balanced" focus in its outlook and programs, according to Bafarawa. The Ambassador stated that the USG regarded all of Nigeria as worthy and deserving of support, and with the Embassy now moved to Abuja from Lagos, including the recent transfer of USAID operations to the capital, the USG would be able to focus more attention and assistance resources in the North. We want to help all of Nigeria, Ambassador Jeter emphasized. USAID Director Tom Hobgood discussed with the Governor what programs AID offered that provided assistance to the North (there are too few), and what it could offer in the future. Bafarawa replied that the primary needs of his state, and the North in general, were in the areas of education, health care, provision of potable water, and agriculture.

The General

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19. (U) The Ambassador met June 20 with General L. Emejuru, One Brigade Commander in Sokoto, who commands all Nigerian Army units in Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara. The Ambassador thanked the General for his assistance during Phase I of Operation Focus Relief and asked for his continued support for OFR III training in Birnin-Kebbi which would be commencing in August. The DATT provided an overview of what that training would entail, and the General promised his continued support for the mission. He said that the training and equipment would benefit the soldiers under his command, and would assist them in enforcing peace in Sierra Leone. He thanked the Ambassador for the courtesy call, and requested that the Commanding Officer of the Birnin-Kebbi barracks be made aware of the USG trainers' planned movements outside the camp in order to provide adequate security.

## The Sultan

10. (SBU) Sultan of Sokoto Mahamadu Maccido, the formal leader of all Muslims in Nigeria, also received the Ambassador June 20. The Ambassador, in a private sidebar, thanked the Sultan for his support of last year's OFR training in Sokoto. The Sultan said that he was "displeased" by reports that "hoodlums" had hijacked and burned beer trucks in Kano, Katsina and Zamfara in the past months. He said that he was using the influence of his office to prevent a recurrence of such incidents. "I do not want Christians to feel threatened by Sharia, or hoodlums to take the law into their own hands."

## Comment

11. (C) Civilian support for OFR, as in neighboring Kebbi State (septel), appears genuine and enthusiastic in Sokoto. Governor Bafarawa, generally regarded as one of the more successful Northern executives, spoke frankly of his administration, including his attempt to keep Sharia reforms within manageable bounds. However, his unwillingness to overturn a sentence of amputation unless his committee of religious experts deems it proper to do so shows the limits he faces in an overwhelmingly Muslim state.

12. (C) The Sultan of Sokoto, formally the head of the Muslim community in Nigeria, is in practice little more than a figurehead (the Emir of Kano, for example, is far more respected, and far more important). The Sultan's pledge to reduce Sharia "incidents" in neighboring states will have little impact. State Governors wield the real power, and when they hesitate to act, or act at cross-purposes (as Governor Sani of Zamfara) the Sultan can do little. However, most Northern Governors pursue the same low-key approach as Bafarawa, and so far they have been largely successful in limiting tension and discord resulting from the Sharia "reform" movement. End comment.

Jeter